

Nutrition Tips for Kids



Highlights

Children need foods from all 5 food groups

A balanced diet includes fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, and dairy

"Sometimes foods" should be limited

Water and milk are the best drink options

Involve your child in planning and preparing meals

Limit sugary snacks and drinks

Encourage fun, positive food experiences

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What is Healthy Eating?

Children need a variety of foods from the 5 food groups to grow and develop properly. These foods provide essential nutrients such as:

Energy

Vitamins

Minerals

Antioxidants

Fibre

Water

Eating a wide variety of fresh foods from these food groups helps children receive the necessary nutrients. Encouraging healthy eating habits helps children make better food choices as they grow, lowering the risk of developing lifestyle-related diseases like obesity, heart disease, and diabetes.

The Five Food Groups

Fruit and Vegetables

Most fruits and vegetables are low in energy but high in fibre and water, helping to keep you full. They provide fibre, folate, and vitamin C. Fruits and vegetables are two distinct food groups.

Grains (Cereals)

Grains are rich in fibre, which aids digestion and helps prevent constipation. They also provide carbohydrates, protein, fibre, and essential vitamins and minerals like folate and zinc. Wholegrain varieties are the best choice for maintaining digestive health. Examples of grains include: wheat, barley, oats, polenta, quinoa, rice, and pasta.

Lean Meat, Fish, Poultry, and Meat Alternatives

These protein-rich foods are vital for brain, nerve, and muscle development. They provide additional nutrients such as iron, zinc, vitamin B12,

and omega-3 fatty acids. Examples include: lean meats (steak, pork), fish, chicken or turkey, eggs, beans (legumes), tofu, and nuts.

Dairy

Dairy products like milk, cheese, and yoghurt provide protein and calcium essential for growth. They are also a good source of iodine, vitamin A, and vitamin D. Reduced-fat dairy is recommended for children over the age of 2.

How much should my child eat?

The number of servings from each food group depends on your child's age. You can find more details on serving sizes in official healthy eating resources. The standard dietary guidelines outline the following recommendations:

Best Drink Options

What is a Healthy Drink?

Drinking water is the best way to quench your child's thirst. A glass of milk is another healthy option.

Drinks to Limit

Other drinks may have added sugar and energy (kilojoules). These drinks should be limited and enjoyed in small amounts:

Flavoured mineral water

Fruit juice drinks

Soft drinks

Sports drinks

Fizzy (carbonated) water or soft drinks are acidic and can lead to tooth decay.

Foods to Limit or Avoid

What Foods Should I Avoid?

'Sometimes foods' are also called junk food or 'discretionary' foods. These are not essential for your child's dietary needs. They are typically processed foods that are low in nutrients and high in salt, saturated fat, and sugar.

'Sometimes foods' include:

- Cake
- Chips
- Chocolate
- Fast foods and fried foods
- Ice cream
- Lollies
- Meat pies
- Pastries

These foods increase the risk of weight gain, which can contribute to childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes. Limit these foods to special occasions and small amounts.

Foods to Avoid

Foods with too much saturated fat can increase the risk of heart disease by raising blood cholesterol levels. Some products with high saturated fat content are:

- Cakes
- Biscuits
- Sausages
- Bacon

Try to choose products that do not contain trans fats. Instead of butter, try using a reduced-fat spread for sandwiches or canola or olive oil for cooking.

Remember, fat is important for young children. Full-fat dairy products should still be given to children under 2 years of age.

Managing a Healthy Diet

Families are busy, so it helps to organise your food for the week. Stock your cupboards with quick, healthy choices and plan your meals. Always have basic foods available to prepare fast, simple, and nutritious meals.

Plan Healthy Meals

Writing out a shopping list is a useful way to plan meals. It also serves as a reminder to eat healthily. Some things to put on your shopping list include:

Eggs, low-fat or skim milk, yoghurt, low-fat cheese
Fresh or canned fruit \ (in own juice or light syrup)\
Fresh, frozen, or low-salt canned vegetables
Fresh or frozen lean meats, such as convenient canned fish
Healthy snacks like fruit, cheese, and yoghurt
Leafy vegetables
Low-sugar, high-fibre cereals
Nuts and seeds
Whole-wheat bread, rice \ (brown is best)\, pasta, and other whole grains

Handy Breakfast Ideas

Boiled egg and toast
Cereal with fruit and yoghurt
Oatmeal \ (porridge)\ made with milk
Scrambled eggs on toast
Toast with peanut butter, fruit, and milk
Cottage cheese and sliced tomato on wholegrain toast

You can make preparing healthy dinners easier by:

Keeping meals simple
Preparing what you can the night before, such as marinating or thawing meat
Using a slow cooker to prepare a soup or stew in the morning, so dinner is already ready in the evening

Most children do not get enough fruits or vegetables. When planning healthy meals, try to include fruits and vegetables in all meals. You can try:

- Keeping a bowl of fresh fruit on the counter
- Storing baby carrots in the refrigerator for snacking
- Offering vegetables to dip in low-fat dressing, hummus, or Greek yoghurt
- Making vegetable soups and colourful salads
- Using a variety of different vegetables in your meals

Change Your Habits

You should try to change your shopping habits if you usually buy:

- Processed baked goods such as pies and sausage rolls
- High-fat, high-sugar snacks like chips and lollies
- Soft drinks
- Sugary fruit drinks

Children get used to having these foods available and will often choose them over healthy snacks like fresh fruits or yoghurt. You can try to:

- Swap chips or biscuits for fruit, vegetables, or popcorn
- Switch from high-sugar cereals to those with less sugar and higher fibre
- Buy wholegrain versions of your usual breads and cereals
- Avoid eating at fast food restaurants. If you do eat out, avoid high-fat side dishes like garlic bread and soft drinks. Try including fresh fruit, vegetables like corn on the cob, and milk or juice in the meal.

Creating Healthy Eating Habits

Healthy eating is usually a family affair. Many parents realise that rushed schedules and frequent dinners from fast food restaurants affect how their children eat and view food.

The best ways to get your kids to eat well are to model healthy eating habits and get them involved in planning meals.

Healthy Snacks

Healthy snacks can help your child meet their daily nutrition requirements.

Always keep a variety of healthy snacks at home, such as:

Fruit

Healthy homemade muffins or muesli bars that are low in refined sugars

Popcorn

Rice crackers

Nuts

Natural yoghurt with chopped fruit

Vegetable sticks with healthy dips such as hummus

Avoid giving your child 'sometimes foods' as snacks since they're a poor source of nutrients.

Making Food Fun

You can encourage your child to eat healthily by making mealtimes fun, social, and interesting. You can:

Cut sandwiches, fruit, and vegetables into interesting shapes

Eat with your children at the dinner table

Encourage them to try new foods and recipes

Teach them about how foods are grown and where they come from

Use a variety of vegetables and fruits in meals

When trying new foods, realise that children may be hesitant due to textures and flavours. Many kids won't try a new food until it's been offered several times. Continue offering a variety of food but try not to become frustrated or force them to eat new foods.

Involving Your Child

Including your child in food-related decisions will make them more excited about healthy eating. Let your child:

Control the amount of food they eat - let them serve themselves or clear their plate

Help write the shopping list

Assist with shopping, cooking, and preparing foods, as appropriate for their age

Create new food combinations

Try serving smaller portions at mealtimes. Encourage your child to ask for more if they are still hungry.

Handling Food Allergies and Intolerances

Some children have allergies or intolerances to certain foods, such as dairy, eggs, nuts, and seafood.

For your child's safety, it's best to confirm an intolerance or allergy with your doctor or an accredited dietitian. They can advise you on how to manage an allergy so your child doesn't miss out on any key nutrients for their growth and development.

What to Do if Your Child Is Overweight

Children often gain too much weight from drinking too much soft drink and juice, eating too many high-calorie snacks and fast foods, and not getting enough exercise.

If you are concerned that your child is overweight, talk to your child's doctor.

Children are rarely put on calorie-restricted diets because it can affect their normal growth. A child may be overweight during their development while their height catches up.

The healthy meal planning tips given here are appropriate for both normal weight and overweight children.

Along with healthy eating, encourage your child to be physically active every day. If you are concerned about your child's weight, speak to your doctor or find an Accredited Practising Dietitian for guidance.

Tools And Assistance

Tools And Assistance

If you're looking for support with your child's healthy eating habits, consider these helpful tools and approaches:

Get the whole family involved - Involve children in cooking, meal prep, and food selection to make healthy eating a shared and enjoyable experience.

Consult a registered dietitian or nutritionist - They can provide personalised guidance based on your child's age, preferences, and health needs.

Use a meal planner - Weekly meal planning templates can help you stay organised and ensure balanced meals are available every day.

Create a shopping checklist - A simple list of healthy pantry staples, fresh produce, and quick snacks can make healthy eating more accessible.

Explore interactive tools for kids - Food games, fun charts, or meal prep tasks can help children learn about nutrition in an engaging way.

Talk to your child's doctor - They can offer advice if you're concerned about your child's weight, growth, or eating patterns.

Join parenting groups or forums - Other parents often share practical meal tips, recipes, and support for picky eaters or special dietary needs.